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ROYAL CIRCUS

EPITOMIZED.

L O N D O N.

Printed for the A U T H O R

And sold by all Booksellers in Lo.

Westminster. 1784.

PRICE TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE.

ROYAL CHURCH

EXHIBITION

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William Davis, Esq;

S I R,

AS you prevailed upon your friends to build the Circus, solely with a view to serve me; as you have repeatedly promised that place should make me independent for life; and declared how happy you were to find an opportunity of essentially assisting an old friend, whose abilities you had an opinion of, and from whose acquaintance you received

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a plea-

a pleasure, I cannot so properly dedicate the following narrative to any person as yourself,

INDEED it addresses itself to you in every page. You signed a memorandum, insuring me my situation ; you exacted my implicit reliance on your word. Whenever I suggested a doubt of the other Proprietors, you assured me you could and would command for me a majority upon all occasions ; and, (notwithstanding you have broken all your engagements with me, though I have incontrovertably convicted you, from your own words, of a conduct scandalous from its fallacy, disgraceful from

from its dishonor, and contemptible from its meanness) you at this moment profess yourself my friend.

HAVING been so long in the habit of relying on such serious and solemn promises, so often reiterated, and given so unsolicited, I have moments when, I flatter myself, you yet mean to keep them; when, your heart having sufficiently upbraided you with your despicable treatment of me, and shewn you how difficult it will be, after this transaction, to persuade other men to trust you, you mean nobly to make one generous struggle, one honourable effort

fort to redeem the ninety-nine
sins of hypocrisy that are past, by
one repentant ray of honesty to
come.

In anxious expectation of the
appearance of your *latent virtue*,

I am,

With every deference and respect
due to *such a benefactor*,

S I R,

Your most humble servant,

C. DIBDIN.

Advertisement.

HAVING shewn this production to many of my literary friends, I am favoured in return with some *Jeu des Esprits* from almost every one of them, together with the liberty of inserting it in addition to my pamphlet.

First giving them my public thanks for the kindness of sanctioning my cause with their better labours, I shall prefix these elegant trifles to the work in the same order, as it was formerly the custom to publish commendatory verses, which, in more instances than this, have been found to make up the best part of the readers entertainment, and, like the superb frame of an indifferent picture, attract more notice than the painting itself.

The

THE HUMBLE

Petition of Common Sense,

TO THE

Proprietors of the Royal Circus,

Sheweth,

THAT your petitioner was born of honest and respectable parents, Reason being your petitioner's father, and Prudence her mother.

That your petitioner humbly conceives, in her dealings with all mankind, she hath rather done good than harm.

That the influence of your petitioner, on the conduct of those connected in public concerns, hath in particular been always found productive of profit and reputation.

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That

That your petitioner had once the pleasure of belonging to the Royal Circus.

That your petitioner, by the malice of her enemies, hath undeservedly incurred your displeasure, and hath, without a fair opportunity of vindicating herself, been disgracefully dismissed from your service.

That your petitioner's conduct hath been unexceptionable.

That your petitioner hath kept no bad company, Good Order and Propriety being her only companions.

That your petitioner hath been attentive to your interest, strenuous in your defence, and anxious to promote your welfare.

That your petitioner's advice hath always been productive of advantage to the concern; that it hath always been found good policy to follow it, Common Sense being nearly allied to Honesty.

That

That your petitioner plainly sees Folly hath
usurped her place.

That your petitioner wishes to warn you,
that Folly hath about her a number of in-
cendiaries, such as Conceit, Self-opinion,
Bad Taste, and Ignorance, who, if not guard-
ed against, will prove the destruction of the
Royal Circus.

That these incendiaries, who are headed by
Obstinacy, will represent matters through
false and artful mediums.

• That they will make derry down sound like
an Italian air, rags appear like embroidery,
counters shine like guineas, and empty benches
seem to have persons sitting upon them.

That these incendiaries will deceive you in
a variety of other instances, till, having led
you on like a Will o' th' Wisp, or an *Ignis*
Fratuus, you will at last find yourselves fast
in the mire.

That your petitioner, more for your own
✓ interest than her's, wishes to be restored.

That

That your petitioner is well aware, without
her assistance the Royal Circus must shut up.

That your petitioner conceives, of your
own accord, you ought to dismiss Folly and
Obstinacy from your councils for ever.

That your petitioner hath not been used to
entreat; but, at the instance of Pity, who
hath a regard for you, she hath been prevail-
ed upon to present this petition.

That, leaving all these matters for your
consideration, your petitioner humbly hopes
you will open your eyes, and receive her into
the Royal Circus;

And your petitioner, as in duty bound, shall
pray.

THE

E P I G R A M.

FABIUS, a surgeon once, now wealthy grown,
 His former pot-companions scarce will own.
 One, Tim by name, more nettled than the rest,
 Hands up his friend in a satiric jest;
 Tells how, with conscience far more wise than nice,
 Fabius his fortune made by loaded dice.
 "You've cut him up," cries one; "all's right,"
 Says Tim;
 "He formerly cut me—now I cut him."

E P I G R A M.

IF he the cruel torture could survive,
 What must the poor wretch suffer, flayed alive,
 And after whipt?—But what feels D—s then,
 First conscience flayed, then lash'd by D——n's pen?

A MORAL COMPARISON.

VIPER was told, 'twas a good thing to cheat,
 That cards and loaded dice made small men great;
 Viper apprentice put him to the trade.
 First learn'd to cut a heart, next slip a spade;
 'Till bolder in nefarious practice grown.
 Of all true gamblers, none about the town,
 Could cog like him, or for a pidgeon poach:
 How has it ended?—Viper keeps his coach.

He pilfer'd in a petty pidling way :
Of wiper all sorts rum codgers would unload,
'Till perfect in his trade, Dick takes the road,
Cries stand, leaps turnpike gates, defies the Bench,
Queers the rum cull, and keeps a handsome wench.
O partial fate! to see near Viper's palace,
Honester Scraggins scragged upon a gallows!

A DISPUTE between JEW BAIL and JEW
FRIENDSHIP.

BLACK WILL for Jew bail to the city was
gone,
To postpone a Jew cause for his crony, Sir John ;
High were Moses' demands, — 'Te tings cout pe
tone,
' Pat twout cosht' — "Zounds," cries Will, almost
angry grown,
' "You're a bail in our debt." — ' No, tish not in te
pont.'
' "Then pay back the money" — ' I nefer refont.'
' "Why, you promis'd" — ' A promish betwixt me
and you !'
' "Ye gods, can I bear it — compar'd to a Jew!"
' "Ten times vorsh ; I put promisht to fint you coot
pails,
' "You to make your friensh fortune, den shent him
te chails."

The

The Equestrian Creed.

WHOEVER would belong to the Royal Circus, before all things it is necessary that he hold the proprietors infallible.

Which infallibility, unless he keep absolute and unequivocal, without doubt he shall perish in the King's Bench.*

And the proprietors infallibility is this, that we flatter one person in five, and five in one, neither confounding the person, or dividing their committees; for there is one person of the city, another of St. Thomas's Hospital, another of Newmarket, another of the Court, and another of Westminster Hall.

But the merchant, the surgeon, the sportsman, the courtier, and the attorney is all one: the stupidity is equal, the absurdity eternal.

* Since this was written Mr. Dibdin has been additionally persecuted, by being removed with a Habeas to the Fleet.

Such as the merchant is, so is the surgeon;
and such is the sportsman, the courtier, and
the attorney.

The merchant stupid, the surgeon stupid,
the sportsman stupid, the courtier stupid, and
the attorney stupid.

The merchant absurd, the surgeon absurd,
the sportsman absurd, the courtier absurd, the
attorney absurd.

The merchant incomprehensible, the sur-
geon incomprehensible, the courtier incom-
prehensible, the attorney incomprehensible.

And yet not only one is stupid, they are all
stupid.

Neither is only one absurd, or one incom-
prehensible; they are all absurd, and all in-
comprehensible.

So likewise the merchant is a committee,
the surgeon a committee, the sportsman a
committee, the courtier a committee, the at-
torney a committee;

And

And yet there are not five committees, but one committee.

So the merchant is manager, the surgeon manager, the sportsman manager, the courtier manager, the attorney manager ;

And yet there are not five managers, but one manager.

So the merchant is a music-master, the surgeon a music-master, the sportsman a music-master, the courtier a music-master, the attorney a music-master ;

Yet are there not five music-masters, but one music-master.

For, as we are compelled by Common Sense to acknowledge every person to be what he is,

So are we forbidden by the Equestrian Creed to acknowledge any proprietor but for what he is not.

~~The~~ The merchant is no committee, for he is never in committee-room.

✓ The surgeon is no committee, for he signs resolutions without agreeing to them.

The sportsman is no committee, for were he to sign, he could not understand the resolution.

The courtier is no committee, he not being a proprietor, but the representative of a proprietor.

The attorney is not a committee, he being the treasurer.

Likewise the merchant is not a manager, but an accomptant.

• Neither is the surgeon a manager, but a horse-racer.

• Neither is the sportsman a manager, but a cock-fighter.

Nor

Nor is the courtier a manager, but an elegant lounge.

Neither is the attorney a manager, but a writer of tautology.

Likewise the merchant is no music-master, he having no ear.

Neither is the surgeon a music-master, he having no taste.

Neither is the sportsman a music-master, he preferring a Jew's harp to a Cremona.

Neither is the courtier a music-master, but a *Dilletanti*.

Neither is the attorney a music-master, he having no harmony in his soul.

Yet are they all committees, all managers, and all music-masters.

And in this concern none is before or after the other; none is greater or less than the other.

But

But the whole five proprietors are equally stupid, equally absurd, equally incomprehensible, and equally infallible.

Yet has each a better fortune than the other; each is a better merchant, surgeon, sportsman, courtier, and attorney, than the other; and each is a better committee-man, manager, and music-master, than the other.

Also each is a better fiddler, a better painter, a better carpenter, a better horse-rider, and a better figure-dancer, than the other.

Each is ignorant, yet each possesses all kind of knowledge.

Each is black and each is white, each is vulgar and each is genteel.

So that in all things as aforesaid, the proprietors must be flattered; their folly must be flattered, their vanity must be flattered; and above all, their flatterers must flatter themselves with a belief of their infallibility.

And he who would belong to the Circus, must thus think of the proprietors.

(2)

I have presented this public in the most
humble manner, and with the most
author and comfort, and the most
right of the public, and the most
three have been successful. Thus the
gathering of the public, which has
ROYAL CIRCUS

EPITOMIZED.

WHEN a man has received boundless obligations from the public, when the labours of his life have been at their devotion, and they have favoured him in return with the ample recompence of profit and reputation, he ought to view his own intentions with the nicest circumspection, and to be convinced he can safely determine to keep truth in constant view, before he officiously calls on the world to judge of his private concerns.

~~Upon this ground I am willing to stand.~~
 I have presented the public at different periods with nearly sixty pieces * of which I am author and composer; beside the music of eight or ten others, and out of all those only three have been unsuccessful. Thus, the flattering applause with which my efforts have been indulgently favoured, would stamp me unworthy of future notice, if in the present relation I dared to obtrude any thing false or futile. The candid public has ever had a pride in taking up the cause of an injured individual; no man can more truly answer that description than myself. I am inhumanly and causelessly persecuted; hunted from my liberty, and suspended from holding a legal right, for no other fault than having relied upon the supposed honour of a set of men who were strangers to that word. I am now irritated, by calumny and oppression, to that appeal which it is peculiarly my province to make. The laws will realize the truth of my claim, but it is the public I proudly ask to decide upon the integrity of my intentions.

* See last page.

The necessity of adverting to every circumstance which may positively or presumptively tend to substantiate the facts in the following narrative, makes it impossible to avoid giving a brief history of the Circus and its origin. This, however, as it has long been a subject of public conversation, may not prove unentertaining, no place having been more internally convulsed, or struggled through more distraction; nor is it wonderful. It was begot at Newmarket, born in St. George's Fields, and nursed in Bridewell, till falling into bad company at the Opera House, it despised the advice of its tutor, aped all the fashionable absurdities, and at last emancipated from the puling childishness of reason and plunged into the full maturity of folly at the Cockpit Royal.

In the month of February, 1782, having previously imparted my intention to Mr. Hughes, I applied to Mr. Davis, of Bury-street, St. James's, to build a place which I intended to call the Royal Circus; offering him a fourth of the profits which should accrue from the amusements there intended

to be exhibited. He took but four and twenty hours to determine, for in that time he had communicated the business to Mr. James Grant, late of Coleman-street, Mr. George Grant, of America-square, and Mr. Harborne, then of Amen-corner, but since of John-street, Adelphi; who having the highest opinion of the plan I had given them, agreed, in conjunction with Mr. Davis, to subscribe sufficient money to erect the building, and that I should be its superintendant and uncontrollable manager; that they would receive the fourth I had offered as a compensation for laying out their money; that Mr. Hughes should have one-third for his performance and breaking horses; and that I should have the remaining five-twelfths, the one-twelfth more than Mr. Hughes's proportion being adjudged me for my trouble as manager.

Mr. Hughes was to provide horses at his own expence, and I was to prepare the scenes at mine; all other out-goings of every denomination the proprietors were to pay.

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The leases of the Magdalen Coffee-house and the two houses adjoining were immediately purchased with a view to erect the building in their stead; but finding the place inconvenient, an application was made to Temple West, Esq. (since dead) of Charlotte-street, Rathbone-place, who owned the reversion of an opposite piece of ground, and who, upon the condition of being received as a proprietor, consented to purchase the life right of the then possessor, and let the ground to the four gentlemen above mentioned, himself also being a party.

The dimensions of the building being determined on, and the heartiest concurrence given to every measure, I suggested all parties to set earnestly to work. Mr. Hughes sought out for performers, I did the same. Upwards of twenty children were bound apprentices to Mr. Grimaldi, who I employed as ballet master, and who, by a memorandum of an agreement with me for the term of five years (in which we mutually covenanted to enter into a special article) promised that the apprentices, then about to be bound to him, should not be employed at any other place than

than the Royal Circus, and not there unless for my emolument, and by my order and direction.

In like manner I entered into an article under the penalty of £. 300 with the father of Master Russell, for three years, and two or three others at shorter periods.

It was now thought a proper time to finally arrange our own articles, for which purpose a meeting was had of the proprietors, Mr. Hughes and myself, where the scheme being upon considerably a larger scale than the original intention, and the expence in consequence likely to be much higher, a fresh agreement was proposed to be entered into, by virtue of which the proprietors were to receive a third of the profit, Mr. Hughes the same, (standing all his own expences) and I the remaining third, and to be allowed an annuity of £. 150 for managing, and to stand at no expence whatever.

An article was ordered to be drawn up by Mr. Harborne, in which the parties were to agree, over and above the afore-metioned covenants,

covenants, that a committee, consisting of Mr. Harman, secretary and treasurer, on the part of the proprietors, Mr. Hughes and myself, should adjust and decide upon the current business, Mr. Harman having the casting vote if any dispute should arise between Mr. Hughes and me.

A licence, through the medium of Colonel West, was now applied for to the Duke of Manchester, which after an interval of some months was refused, it appearing very doubtful whether a sufficient power was vested in the Lord Chamberlain to permit a public entertainment beyond the precincts of the court, and his grace being young in office, was very tenacious of treading upon unprecedented ground.

It was now July, and no article drawn up, for which a variety of reasons were given. Mr. Harborne was represented as a man of such extensive business, that a failure in point of time on his part, ought to be considered as an admissible excuse; Mr. Davis repeatedly assured me, that on this account he was obliged to put up with the neglect of
private

private business of much greater magnitude; that nothing could exceed the fairness of their intentions, and I might be perfectly at ease. These very excuses also were held out to Col. West, whose lease and private agreement as proprietor were not executed. As I carried my good opinion of Mr. Davis to a pitch of enthusiasm, and for the short time I knew him, I had the highest sentiments of Col. West's honour and integrity, this satisfied me. Indeed every lover of truth must revere his memory; for if a man of sound and uncorruptible principles ever existed, that man was Colonel West. He was besides wonderfully calculated to take a part in a public concern; he had judgment to discover genius, and spirit to encourage it; but it seems as if a fatality marked the wayward steps of this unfortunate place; and because there happened to be one man belonging to it who had taste and liberality enough to rescue it from the barbarism of arithmetic, the craft of chicane, or the designing nicety of a gambling calculation, he must be snatched away, and the building be deprived of its strongest prop and fairest ornament.

Mr.

Mr. Hughes, however, was less at ease than me; he apprehended, and very strongly, some improper design on the part of the proprietors, nor did he scruple to aver that the business of the lease was held out as a false light to deceive us both; indeed, so freely did he broach these sentiments, and in such invidious terms, that being of an opinion totally opposite to his, I refused to speak to him, except about mere business, for several months.

The mode of making decisions in the committee was now totally altered, Mr. Harman not having for some time had a voice, but some one or other of the proprietors in his stead; for as the building advanced, it became a subject of amusement to them, and they were as proud of owning themselves parties concerned, as they were before shy of being known to have any thing to do with it; none of this I ever checked, but made it my study to please and satisfy them, little thinking I was teaching them the art of governing only to dethrone me.

In this, however, they have been a little premature; the theatrical scepter, like a witch's spell, or a forcerer's talisman, contains many figurative charms, which, if ill preserved, or improperly used, only brings down confusion on their heads, who have the temerity to tamper with them.

A licence having been refused by the Lord Chamberlain, the proprietors advised with Mr. Mingay how they could best apply to the Magistrates of the county for their permission. They were informed by that gentleman, that the only time at which the bench could grant leave, was at the Michaelmas sessions; he further cautioned them not to open the Circus, till such consent was obtained. This advice, however, I ventured to oppose the moment I heard it. Mr. Mingay, as a counsel, was right. To fly in the face of the law, did not certainly appear the likeliest means of obtaining its protection; but if he had had any eventual judgment concerning the probable fate of a new public place, his sentiments must have been the reverse; so much did I feel

feel the force of this, that I made no scruple to declare we ought immediately to open without a licence.

To support this opinion, I gave the following reasons: the interest that had been exerted to procure the licence from the Lord Chamberlain, together with the many preparations going forward, had not only excited universal curiosity, but raised some envy; the seeds of an opposition to the application at michaelmas were already sown; these the world's ignorance of the scheme would be sure to nourish, till they got to such a head as to choke up all our hopes; proof of this came to us from some quarter or other every day; some reported that the place was built for tumbling and rope-dancing, and the introduction of drinking. Upon this ground I was sure the magistracy would make a point of setting their faces against it, lest it should encourage idleness; others, who had heard Sir John Lade and Mr. Davis took a part in it, availed themselves of the general opinion of those gentlemen, by propagating that

it was to be a receptacle for gambling.* The theatres, naturally opposed it, thinking a place prepared at such an expence might in the end rival them very formidably; all these difficulties I contended would be obviated by opening as soon as possible. I argued, that let whoever would espouse our cause, the town was at last our best protection and firmest dependance. There if we found friends, we might laugh at private malignity, nay, that the very reports which were so industriously spread, would recoil upon those who had the temerity to level them at us. What had we to do with fear? we were ourselves conscious that nothing was intended but harmless amusements represented by children, which could not encourage dissipation; and which, so far from militating against the interest of the theatres, would be found to be a nursery for them, as the schools of Oudinot and Nicholet are for those in Paris.

* At this time a paragraph appeared in one of the papers, giving a supposed opinion of the entertainments, where Sir John Lade and Mr. Davis were reflected on, in the way I allude to above, in pretty severe terms.

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I was answered, if we had so many enemies; they would certainly take advantage of our opening without a licence, and inform against the place. I found no difficulty in pronouncing it would be the very best thing that could happen to us, we should then see our danger, and know how to guard against it. That having confirmed ourselves in the public good opinion, it would become a public cause. That the eligibility of the scheme, and the regularity with which it was intended to be conducted, would confound the tongue of scandal. The consideration that so many children and their families were maintained by it, and other favourable appearances, would send the application to the sessions upon such fair ground, as could not fail to insure it success.

This advice operating contrary to my wishes, the work was slackened, and the place ordered to be got ready for October, instead of the following month.

For the first time, I began to discover a sort of positiveness in most of the proprietors, to which I had hitherto been unaccustomed. I did not like to thwart it, and yet I feared their persisting in error would terminate
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in that very wilfulness which has been the destruction of almost every reasonable measure hitherto proposed. Contenting myself, however, with representing the folly of their so strenuously contending for a point, of which they had not experience enough to see the probable consequences, and warning them that they would see my words verified, I gave up the matter, not without advising them to neglect no opportunity of gathering the sense of the magistrates, previous to the sessions.

The first step they took towards this, was to give a public dinner, to which many of the gentlemen in the commission of the peace were invited; none however attended; and this confirmed me stronger than ever, that my apprehensions were but too well founded.

I now conceived it absolutely necessary, that a memorial should be drawn up, and presented to the magistrates, by some one or other of the proprietors. The idea met their concurrence, and it was to be done immediately; but Mr. Davis and Mr. Harborne being continually in the country, neither of the Mr. Grant's attended for a long while, and

and Col. West, most unfortunately for the concern, being taken ill, this necessary preliminary was neglected, and the licence when applied for lost by eighteen against fifteen affirmative voices, the greatest part of which majority declared themselves influenced against the application, by a letter which was read in court, written by order of the Secretary of State, to the Lord Lieutenant of the county of Surry, advising the bench to licence no new places of public entertainment; and this letter was actually procured, by a representation that the Circus was intended for E O tables, and every species of debauchery.

Thus, according to my prediction, the licence was lost by false and scandalous reports against the place, and clearly shews, corroborated by what really happened when the Circus was actually opened without any permission whatever, that had my advice been taken, we must have been successful.

Col. West continuing extremely ill, the advantage of his advice was lost, and the other proprietors a good deal soured by their disappointment, were some time before they came to any resolution; at length my original

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nal idea was adopted, and the place opened without a licence.

The world well recollects what encouragement the amusements received, some of the first characters in the kingdom resorted to the Circus; and it was considered as one of the most pleasant and fashionable places about town. The continual cry of the proprietors was, that I had done wonders, and that let what would be the fate of the concern, there was no degree of liberality that should not be shewn me for such uncommon and successful exertions.

In all this time no article was prepared; and though I was unceasingly teased by Mr. Hughes, who went very great lengths indeed, and took most unwarrantable liberties with the proprietors names, to support his assertions, though he even assured me, that they had consulted together to dismiss me, though he called in Mr. Grimaldi to witness it, who declared, he had heard the proprietors say, they would never sign an agreement with either me, or Mr. Hughes; this, and ten times more had not power to shake my opinion. I certainly was anxious that the matter
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should

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should be finished. I expostulated with Mr. Davis, and with Col. West, on the subject; the first of whom *seemed*, and the other *was* as uneasy as myself. Mr. Davis declared, that were the intentions of the other proprietors such as Mr. Hughes and Mr. Grimaldi represented, yet his connections with them were of such a kind, and his power over them so great, that he "could and would," (these were his words,) "command for me their majority upon all occasions; but the fact was the very reverse, the proprietors having the best intentions towards me." That the preparation of the article was only delayed by the negligence of Mr. Harborne, he laughed at my fears, and wondered how I could entertain them: must not he be void of honour, and merit the reproach of every honest man, if he could be capable of deluding me upon a subject so serious, so material to me?

I could not bear so many appeals to my feelings. I blushed that I had for a moment entertained an ill opinion of a man, than whom Lucifer or Iago would not have better acted the part of a friend. I considered Mr. Hughes and Mr. Grimaldi as

two incendiaries, who, for selfish ends, were endeavouring to set me at variance with the proprietors, and I became more careless about the article than ever.

An information was laid against the Circus, and we were open only nine nights. My prophecy began now to be verified; all who had been our enemies became our warmest advocates; very distinguished persons consulted with us about opening again, and intelligence was given us from very powerful authority, that another application to the Lord Chamberlain would be successful.

The general expences, however, being all incurred, and the performers engaged, we thought it adviseable to open, if possible, upon some plan within the law, which we could extend, if we had the good fortune to succeed with the Lord Chamberlain, or continue (if the application failed) till the following October.

For this purpose, I devised a mode of amusement unlike any thing we had done before; which, sanctioned by counsels opinion, was brought out with success; but at the end
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(19)
of the fifth night, a new information being laid, Mr. Hughes was taken up and sent to Bridewell.

In proportion as we were persecuted, so we gained friends. At the sessions, Mr. Hughes was honourably released, and the entertainment pronounced not to have been illegal. The application to the Lord Chamberlain went on rapidly, who being solicited in a very powerful manner, declared he would give a licence, if the Attorney-General would pronounce him competent to do it.

This business kept us on in anxious expectation till the latter end of February, when Mr. Hughes absolutely insisted on an article, without which, he declared, he would withdraw himself from the scheme.

I now began to find that this matter has been procrastinated only to beat us down in point of terms; for upon requiring so serious an explanation, it awkwardly came out that they had a good deal considered of it, and that in a different way than formerly. They now began to talk of the vast sums of money that had been laid out, of the loss the

place had sustained in throwing away so much time, that if no licence should be obtained, or the concern involved in any future embarrassment, they must bear all the burden. In short, the new proposal was, that Mr. Hughes and I should receive each a fourth of the profits, after paying all common expences, allowing them interest for their money, and a hundred a year ground-rent.

How did Mr. Davis come off here? I am ashamed to say with flying colours. He made it appear as plain to me, that I should clear two thousand a year for my life, as ever Breslaw did one of his auditors, that he had conjured a shilling into his pocket, when the fact was, he had picked it of two, which were paid coming in at the door,

I did, however, muster up so much clear-sightedness, as to be a little uneasy, not for fear the article should not be signed, but lest they should pare away its value till it was not worth signing; and joining issue with Mr. Hughes, never ceased importuning Mr. Davis, till, with the approbation of the proprietors, he signed a memorandum of an agreement,
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in behalf of himself and the rest, in the terms before mentioned, with the addition of tying up Mr. Hughes and myself from engaging at any other place of amusement, and a promise of entering into a special agreement, as soon as it should be found convenient to lay a proper deed before counsel. This memorandum was also signed by Mr. Hughes and myself, and witnessed by Mr. Harman.

Whether the Attorney-General's opinion was never obtained, whether he was prevented from giving it, whether the interest used to get at the Lord Chamberlain was overturned by opposite influence, or whatever was the cause, I will not venture to pronounce my opinion; certain it is, we got no licence. The matter has been so variously represented to me, that in relating what I have been told, I might very likely take a liberty with high and distinguished characters, who, for ought I can with certainty advance, never heard of the Royal Circus but in common with the rest of the world. Great names are very often used to serve little purposes; here they were used to no purpose at all.

This

This refusal determined us once more to open the Circus, merely to feel the pulse of the town, and to try whether all the pompous reports of our success among the great would not so far awe our enemies as to make them desist from any further persecution.

We did so, and it answered our end beyond expectation. The Circus was opened on the 15th of March, and it continued so without interruption till the middle of the following September; during all which time the sense of the memorandum was literally conformed to by the payment of a fourth of the profits to Mr. Hughes and myself every Saturday.

Soon after the Circus opened, Mr. Sewell, my Attorney and Solicitor, drew up a special deed, which was read by the proprietors, and (except the preamble and the mode of tying me to the Circus) approved of.

In Mr. Sewell's article, conformable to the memorandum, I was the acknowledged manager of the stage department for my life; my current conduct was to be decided upon by a
weekly

weekly committee, which, so far from having a power to dismiss me from the Circus, was obliged to support and uphold me in it.

I should here mention, that just before this period, Mr. James Grant had sold his share to Sir John Lade, and Mr. Harborne had erected himself into the joint characters of treasurer, solicitor, and proprietor.

This circumstance did not create a little jealousy among the other proprietors, nor was it by any means a pleasant thing to either Mr. Hughes or myself, a proprietor being a very improper treasurer to a concern. This was represented at Sir John Lade's house, the Sunday before the place opened; Mr. Davis, Sir John Lade, Mr. Grant, Mr. Hughes, and myself present; and Mr Davis taking up the matter extremely warm, proposed the place for Mr. Savage, a gentleman we all knew, and of whose integrity we had the highest opinion. This met the wishes of every one present, and I expected to see him in his office the following Saturday; instead of whom, however, Mr. Harborne singly nominated

nated Mr. Grosmith, his brother-in-law, who has ever since acted as a treasurer for him, and lately with the additional title of Secretary.

I only mention this circumstance, to shew how completely the proprietors were ruled by the brilliant Mr. Harborne; nor can it be wondered at. I have already instanced his *alacrity* in the dispatch of business, and when I come, in its place, to give a specimen of the elegance of his taste, the winning sprightliness of his manner, and the captivating charms of his oratorical eloquence, the most lively hopes may be entertained, that before the Circus shall finish its career, the world will see him making out latitats upon three horses, taking instructions for a brief in a pantomime, or imitating the serjeants when they make their bows at Westminster Hall in a *Minuet de la Cour*.

This same Mr. Harborne, with infinite labour and pains (I think I see him wiping his forehead) from the draft made out by Mr. Sewell, formed another, in which were introduced

duced many particulars totally foreign to the original intention. Neither Mr. Hughes nor myself was to have the liberty, without the consent of a committee, to publish any book; that sixty pounds a week were to be deposited in his hands as a fund to pay all contingent expences. He nominated himself also perpetual treasurer. The Committee was to have such an absolute power, that were they inclined to make vexatious and frivolous resolutions, the concern must have been so har- rassed and perplexed, that no business of either Mr. Hughes's department or mine could possibly have gone on.

I not only saw all this, but that the prohibition of publications struck particularly hard at me. It was represented to me, however, that no advantage should be taken of me; that the article was so worded, lest any non- sense of Mr. Hughes (I use the words of Mr. Davis and Mr. Harborne) should be publish- ed to the disgrace of the concern; that he was a man so troublesome and unprincipled, and his conduct had been so reprehensible, they were determined to have every possible curb on him, and particularly that the words and

music of all my pieces were not implied in the clause.

At this time another agreement was entered into by the Proprietors themselves, to enforce the observance of their own private engagements. This deed is very material to my claim. It was executed by Colonel West, Mr. Davis, Mr. Harborne, Mr. George Grant, and Sir John Lade, and provided, among many other things, for the security of the proceedings of a committee, by a clause to the following effect: That should any of the Proprietors be inclined to sell a share, it should be offered at a stipulated price to the rest, and that upon their refusal of the bargain, the buyer should be obliged to purchase, subject to all covenants and agreement whatsoever; and particularly that the present, as well as all future Proprietors, should be bound to keep, in the strictest sense, all engagements entered into with Mr. Hughes and myself. The memorandum recited above, which Mr. Davis entered into with the concurrence of the rest of the Proprietors, was signed previous to the execution of the agreement some months.

Will the sagacious Mr.

Harborne

Harborne after this say he knew any thing of law when he signed my discharge from the Circus?

From the month of October, 1781, to this hour, (for it should be understood that I had long such a scheme in idea, though till February I could not find a person to take it in hand in any eligible way) I have received no emolument from any other place than the Circus. It will not therefore appear astonishing, that in such a length of time I should find it necessary, for my private purposes, to receive money on account from the Proprietors. I did so, previous to the 15th of March, to the amount of 2611. which sum, together with every other expended or advanced for any purpose whatever, was agreed in the draft of the special article to go into a mass, estimated at 12,000l. for which the concern was to pay ten per cent. interest.

I was in debt about 600l. at the commencement of the scheme, some of which demands it would be very tedious and unpleasant to explain; they were the dregs of former law-suits, penalties of engagements for a valuable and unfortunate relation, and some the con-

sequences of follies committed twenty years ago ; these debts, by the 15th of March, grew to 800l. simply by the addition of law expences. The Circus now began to yield me very handsomely, and I had paid, by the month of July, near 400l.

About this time the remainder of my creditors began to persecute me in a most rigorous and extraordinary manner ; this appeared very singular, as they had received from me so much money, and more especially as the loading me with law expences would only diminish my ability to satisfy them.

Upon searching into this business, I easily found they were set on ; the Proprietors were of the same opinion, and made no scruple to pronounce Mr. Hughes the incendiary instrument ; so much did Mr. Davis appear irritated at it, that he gave a promise to the officer, who was always upon these occasions employed to arrest me, that he would answer for every thing in future against me, that my person might be safe, and I might pursue my business in tranquility.

Why

Why Mr. Davis refused to keep his word, the very next time I was arrested, he best knows.

The Circus about this time began to be one of the compleatest scenes of confusion that folly, ignorance, and interested art could plunge it into. The parents of the apprentices were eternally presenting me with petitions against Mr. Grimaldi; criminal accusations were preferred, addressed to religious lords; the magistrates interfered, and a compleat investigation into the morals and conduct of the place was ordered; some conscientious gentlemen in the commission, who had resolved right or wrong to vote against it the following October, were for its annihilation; and one in particular declared, he was so shocked at the idea of bringing up a number of children to the stage, that he should be afraid to meet them in the other world lest they should reproach him. The gentleman, I believe, did not consider that there would be no such danger, if that meeting happened to be in Heaven.

Three

Three very respectable gentlemen were appointed inquisitors upon this occasion, whose great humanity, high honour, and unimpeachable integrity, are universally acknowledged. They found nothing that could induce them to take part against the place, and not only the accusation fell to the ground, but the attempt to injure the scheme turned out materially to its advantage.

We were however the best judges of our internal commotions. Mr. Grimaldi's knowledge of the foibles of the Proprietors, his accommodating temper, and above all the secret manner in which he wormed himself into their favour to my prejudice, glossed over with them a number of most unpardonable faults; and it was in vain for me to order him upon any duty, when by a tale told to Mr. Harborne he could get himself excused.

As to the rest, Mr. Hughes was evidently trying to get the place into his own hands, by harrassing the Proprietors with accounts, in which they made no scruple to say they
were

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were imposed on, ordering dresses they disapproved of, and using their names with most licentious and unwarrantable freedom. All this, together with his canvassing the county in his name for the licence, and much other indirect conduct, so alarmed the Proprietors, that they were now the most anxious for the articles; several meetings were had on it, and at last Mr. Hughes, upon being paid all his demands, agreed that the licence should be made out in his name and mine; and that proper alterations being made in the mode and manner of the article by Mr. Davis and Mr. Pardon, the spirit of it, which had always been complied with, should remain, and then it should be executed.

Thus matters continued in tolerable tranquillity (except, as usual, fresh law-suits being conjured up against me; some legal, others not so) till October.

The day came when we must apply for the licence; and Mr. Hughes, after all that had passed, insisted upon having it made out in his name, or not at all. Nothing could
equal

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equal the astonishment of the Proprietors at this demand; they fairly declared it should have my name to it, as a check upon Mr. Hughes, or they would give up every concern with the place; that they had the highest opinion of my abilities; that my conduct had been fair, honest, and in every respect unexceptionable; whereas they believed Mr. Hughes to be guilty, in many instances, of proceedings directly the reverse.

For my own part, I saw very plainly that the least appearance of dispute amongst ourselves would infallibly overturn our whole scheme; besides, it was the clearest thing in the world that Mr. Hughes wrangled for no more than an additional feather to his equestrian helmet, which I was very well contented he should wear. I argued, that while they were in contention for a mere name, the shadow of the business, they would lose the licence, which was the substance; and that the place, and not the person, was the object of permission. In this opinion Mr. Mingay joined me; the licence was asked for in the name of Mr. Hughes, and granted.

During

During the meeting at Kingston, our future operations were a subject of consultation. As the place could now open by authority, as the entertainments would be entirely changed, by the introduction of burlettas and pantomimes, the orchestra thrown open, together with several other desirable advantages, of which we might now avail ourselves, I advised a recommencement of the amusements. I nevertheless warned them how impossible it would be to keep open the whole winter; but in order to make it up to the performers, to take expence off the shoulders of the concern, and to provide novelty for the ensuing summer season, I further advised an excursion to Liverpool, Norwich, or some other capital place; there to wear out the old pieces, to be in the continual practice of new ones, and so come back at Easter with a fund of fresh dramatic materials, which would be so much variety ready prepared with little trouble, and no expence.

Nothing could be more eagerly caught at than this advice; it was so feasible; such a self-evident advantage; so like generalship:

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Why,

Why, then, was not it adopted? The Proprietors of the Circus would not be consistent, if they were once in the right: They have a most tender affection for their own opinion; and as to obstinacy, no drove of pigs, in their journey from Berkshire to Smithfield, ever had such an aversion to a direct road.

Had my advice been taken, the Public would not now be nauseated at the Royal Circus (that place which once vied with the Opera-house; which, under the title of the Fairy World, enchanted its audience with all the magic of its name;) with the leavings of a barrel organ, the dregs of a porter club, or the refuse of Sadler's Wells.

Three or four days before we applied for the licence, the Circus and the world had the misfortune to lose Col. West, after having endured for near a twelvemonth all the torture and languor of a slow consuming wound, with a resignation and fortitude which, like all other of his actions, evinced his great mind. He dying, bequeathed wretchedness to his family, sorrow to all his connections, and regret to the memory of every man who
had

who had the happiness and advantage of his acquaintance.

The Circus opened, and considering the expences of the recess, the stock required to bring out the new things, and other incidental and unavoidable out-goings, did tolerably well. After a few weeks, however, it was decidedly clear that it would not do in the winter; this induced me to think in earnest of the country scheme. I pressed Mr. Hughes about it, who promised to write to Norwich, and proposed it afresh to the Proprietors, from whom I was astonished to receive a cool answer.

I had now paid near 600l. to my creditors; and yet, so great a part of this sum was for law expences, that I was still in debt 450l. It is incredible, upon the failure of the success of the Circus, how I was persecuted; and all for trifles; which, by the management of bailiffs, evidently at the instance of Mr. Hughes, were magnified into things of consequence. If I was to sign a warrant of attorney, it was in his house; if I was arrested, it was in his house. In short, the most scan-

dalous and illegal measures were taken purposely to expose me; and every illicit and vulgar manœuvre put in practice to injure my peace of mind, and render me incapable of doing my business.

So much did this appear the opinion of the Proprietors, that, to relieve my inconveniences at that time, they deposited their draft of a hundred pounds in the hands of Mr. Sewell, and impowered him to inform my creditors, that they would be answerable for the payment of the rest of my debts in a twelve-month.

Mr. Davis promised to be present at the meeting of my creditors, instead of which, however, he wrote the following letter:

Copy of Mr. DAVIS'S FIRST LETTER.

SIR,

I AM very sorry that I cannot meet you this evening in town, being obliged, on particular business, to go this afternoon to Maidenhead.

Maidenhead. I hope my absence will be attended with no inconvenience; you know our sentiments, and therefore you may propose to the creditors the mode which we settled. I believe I shall be in London to-morrow, and possibly I may have the pleasure of meeting you at the Circus.

I am your humble servant,

WM. DAVIS.

Taplow, Wednesday morning.

Stephen John Sewell, Esq;

Golden-square, London.

This letter being read, and Mr. Sewell explaining the sentiments of Mr. Davis to be a determination to enter into the above agreement, the creditors were very well satisfied, and another meeting was proposed, when Mr. Davis was to be present, and finish the business.

On the day of this meeting, however, Mr. Sewell received the following letter:

LETTER II.

SIR,

I AM sorry to acquaint you, that Mr. West, Mr. Grant, and Mr. Harborne, absolutely

lately decline to undertake to settle Mr. Dibdin's affairs; or to engage for the payment of any part of his debts. I am therefore, to my great mortification, in a minority of the Proprietors of the Circus, and have not the power of shewing my regard to Mr. Dibdin, by getting his business settled. I shall be glad of seeing you; and am your humble servant,

WM. DAVIS.

Stephen John Sewell, Esq;

Notwithstanding this shuffling, another gentleman of the law, as well as Mr. Sewell, advised the creditors to rest contented, assuring them that the promise made by the Proprietors was binding in the strictest manner, even though not formally entered into, they having empowered Mr. Sewell to make it in their name. The creditors were satisfied with this, and went away, after being witness for one another that they would think no more of me, but seek their remedy against the Proprietors, at the end of the twelvemonth.

Mr. Davis has lately had the kindness to say, that as soon as Mr. Sewell, (who is contending for my right) shall have *done me a service,*

Since, I shall write a paniphlet against him by way of thanks. I would ask Mr. Davis, if he himself ever did me a service, how comes it I am now in the King's Bench? and if Mr. Sewell is serving me, does not Mr. Davis confess his own conscioufness of my re-establishment? The malignity of this caution to Mr. Sewell is too apparent. Mr. Davis knows how much it is his interest to prejudice my solicitor against me; fortunately, however, Mr. Sewell has too good an opinion of me to be wrought on by any such insinuations; and if he had not, his inveterate integrity in the discharge of his conduct to his clients, will ever induce him to take care of his honour and his character, than to suffer any craft or cunning to turn him aside from an honest discharge of his duty.

Mr. Sewell has suffered from Mr. Hughes almost as many indignities as I have, and wholly on my account. 'Tis a shame that Mr. Davis is not content with his treatment of me, without conniving at any dirty work of a man, whose name he has, in my hearing, a hundred times execrated.

Three

Three of these creditors had actions against me, upon which I had been a long time held to bail; one of whom dropped all proceedings, but the other two went on at the commencement of the Term; being therefore incapable of paying the money: on the 21st of January, I was obliged to surrender myself to prison, to exonerate my bail.

It will appear very curious in this place, that when the Proprietors refused to fulfil their promise of paying my debts, they advised me to throw myself into the King's-Bench, offering to be security for the rules, and to give me apartments in the Circus; will it be credited then, after I had surrendered myself, they not only refused to be my security, but first voted me out of the Circus, and then used a secret influence to prevent my getting the rules at all. It is however very true; and though I hug myself at the good consequences that must result to me from their shallow, miserable policy, I cannot help feeling the malice and rancour of such a scandalous business, with that indignation in which I am sure every honest man must join me.

But,

But, as Macheath says, "It is a plain proof the world's all alike, and that even our gang can no more trust one another, than other people." Sorry I am that I have to reproach myself with belonging to that gang.

To clear my ground I must go back to about six weeks after the Circus opened, at which time a resolution was formed to shut it up, to open at Christmas, and then continue the entertainments if they should succeed. This I strongly opposed, recommending the country scheme; the Proprietors, however, confident of success, over-ruled me.

When the place came to be opened, matters turned out as I had represented them, even the first week did not bring its expenses.

This caused such universal dissatisfaction, that every Saturday was expected to be the last of the season. Sir John Lade came to the Committee-room, and constantly blamed me for suffering the music to go ill, exhibiting such a curious and scientific system of criticism,

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cism, as I sincerely believe, were it reduced to rule, would procure a sweepstakes to be run for in all the regularity of a *pas de quatre*—As well as edified by it, I should have been extremely amused, if it had not been embellished with some hints of properer managers, and the names of Grimaldi, Slingsby, Novoscielski, and others, occasionally dropped, “who were capable of bringing the whole world to the Circus.”

Since however the place was so indifferently conducted, either it should not continue open, or the expences should be considerably lowered; he asked me first of all what part of the band I could spare? I said I could very ill spare any, but if it must be curtailed, I should begin with the trumpets. No, with a look of most ineffable contempt at my ignorance, he insisted on the trumpets being kept, even though *they should play by themselves*, for that they had a monstrous effect in recitative. As I knew I might as well have explained myself to one of his grey horses, and as I had more whims than his to please, I contented myself with tacitly striking

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ing out the trumpets, and the names of a few useless performers, who had been only engaged in compliment to Mr. Hughes. Every preparation for novelty which happened to be in hand was next ordered to be stopped; painters, carpenters, and others, were to be discharged by wholesale; and as we had low receipts, so we were to have low expences. It was in vain to represent that I could not produce new things without materials; I might use the old ones; that is to say, Tom Thumb might appear as an Alderman, Dollalolla as a witch, and the queen of the giants squeeze herself into the fly-jacket of a fairy. They however, at this moment, have recourse to more miserable expedients; for instead of those dresses which induced the world to call the Circus the temple of taste, the performers are stuck out in all the draggle-tail finery of a masquerade at St. Giles's. Perhaps the Cyprian queen of that equestrian Adonis, Sir John, condescends to inspire the wardrobe-keeper with the sublimity of her taste.

Nay, more impossibilities than these were exacted from me; I was to discharge the performers

formers (purposely engaged for the new pieces) and then bring out the new pieces without them.

Expostulating with Mr. Davis upon the absurdity of all this, he told me not to regard any thing Sir John Lade said, for that he was a man who would set every body of people together by the ears he had any thing to do with.

On the other hand, my good ally, Mr. Hughes, was continually in consultation with his bosom friend and secretary, Mr. Stratford, (the bailiff who always arrested me) how to make a finish at once of me and my affairs : He made a violent entry into my house, and possessed himself forcibly in his rage, not only of all my property, but of the landlord's, without authority of any kind whatever, unless his having, against my consent, undertook to pay money for me (evidently with a view of getting me into his power) can be so called.

The Circus was now in a state of the most complete distraction ; the very servants saw I was not properly supported by the proprietors,

and therefore lost all respect for me. In short, all subordination was at an end; nor could the eloquence of the accomplished Mr. Harborne restore it, as will appear by the reception of the following oration, which well deserves a title by itself.

ORATION *delivered by* RICHARD HARBORNE,
*Esq. to the leading-stringed Figure Dancers of
the Royal Circus.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

DO you know I am one of the proprietors?
—My will here is to be a law; and if you do any thing wrong, I'll jerk you; I'll make you know your Lord God from Tom Bell.

A universal tittering immediately prevailed; the confusion recommenced, and in five minutes the great Mr. Harborne was heard lamenting that his authority had not been able to awe one of the rebels, whom he detected, like Guy Faux, bearing a light to set off the fire-works before their time.

Within

Within a day or two of this memorable event, I came to the King's Bench; Mr. Davis gave his name as one of my securities for the rules, and suffered Mr. Sewell to make the usual enquiries; but being asked when he would sign the bond, answered not at all, because the rest of the proprietors had refused to join him.

I began to see the world now in a new light. I feared what Mr. Hughes and many others had told me of Mr. Davis (that he had not really been my friend, but appeared so by the consent of the other proprietors, the better to carry their measures) was but too true, the more especially as he had recently sold half his share to Mr. Grimaldi. To investigate this at once, I sent him the following letter and resolutions:

S I R,

MATTERS respecting the Circus having gone to a very alarming length, it becomes necessary that I should request the literal performance of those promises you have so often
made

made me, and which as a friend, a man, and a gentleman, you are bound to abide by.

Through the whole progress of this business, it has been your uniform declaration to me, that I had a right to the fourth of the profits, and to consider myself as the manager of the stage department at the Circus, fully and entirely subject only to the controul of a committee; and whenever I have expressed my fears of any unwillingness on the part of the proprietors to fulfil this agreement, you have dissipated them by assuring me, that you could and would command a majority in my favour.

You have (empowered by a committee) signed a paper to the above effect; and, from the spirit of that paper, an article has been actually drawn, but not executed; and tho' I know, from the best authorities, that it is strongly binding on the parties, yet from a natural wish to prevent litigation, I have frequently urged a formal perfecting of the necessary writings. Whenever I have done so, you

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you have constantly assured me you would never sell your share, or any part of it, till you had seen every thing settled to my entire satisfaction.

You have very often, not only professed yourself perfectly satisfied with my attention to the Circus, but have ever expressed an astonishment at my being able to furnish it with so much variety ; and when I was unjustly and cruelly harrassed by my creditors, evidently through collateral and incendiary means, you gave it as your opinion, that no man was ever with so little reason so inhumanly persecuted.

When we went to Kingston, you had the highest sense, according to your own declaration, of my talents and integrity ; so much so, indeed, that you assured me you would rather lose the licence than not have my name to it.

The world tells me, at this moment, that you are changed ; that you look lightly upon all the promises you have formerly made, and

and hold up your having parted with half your share as a proof of it. My answer is, that 'tis impossible. That a breach of such engagements would speak you void of that honour on which I have so long relied, and which I give you an opportunity of vindicating, by entreating you to move the two resolutions in the committee, which my brother (to whom I have given a power of attorney) will have the pleasure of delivering to you.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

King's Bench,

C. DIBDIN.

Feb. 2, 1784.

W. Davis, Esq; Bury-street, St. James's.

Resolution 1st.

MR. DIBDIN having conceived it necessary, in consequence of the change of some of the proprietors, to request a resolution of the committee, explaining his situation at the Circus: Resolved, That he is considered, for the term of his natural life, as manager of the stage and all its entertainments; and allowed, for his trouble in conducting that department,

ment, a full fourth of all the profits arising from the receipts at the doors, after the expences are paid; ten per cent. interest allowed upon £. 12,000, and £. 100 a year for ground-rent.

Resolution 2d.

Mr. Dibdin having requested, in conformity to the tenor of the subsisting agreement, leave to write and compose an opera for one of the theatres, Resolved, in consideration of his present inconveniencies, that such leave be given.

These were intended to be delivered at the Cockpit while the proprietors were sitting there in a committee; but apprehending, I suppose, something of that sort from me, the waiters had orders to say that there were not any proprietors there.

The letters, however, and resolutions, were delivered to Mr. Davis, at his house, by Mr. Wilde, whom he told I had been the day before voted out of the Circus; that it was a dis-

a disagreeable business; that he had no hand in it; owned to signing the memorandum, having given me his honour he would see me situated in the Circus to my wish; and, in short, every tittle I had charged him with in the letter. He said he supposed the matter would cost me a law suit, and heartily wished he could be of any service to me.

Thunderstruck with the intelligence of the vote, and very unsatisfied with the vague manner in which he seemed to get rid of my importunity, I wrote to him as follows:

S I R,

WHATEVER the proprietors of the Circus may have thought proper to resolve relative to me, I cannot admit such a measure in the smallest degree an extenuation of your having forfeited your promises. You have had the manliness to avow your having made those promises; have still the justice to see them fulfilled. They go to the very existence of my character; my public reputation and my private interest. I have rested on them

with full confidence; for them I have slighted the advice of my friends, resisted every offer however eligible, and neglected (indeed my only neglect in this business, whatever false accusations may have been preferred against me) to insist upon the execution of a special article, which would have precluded all possibility of the very candid and gentleman-like vote which has so recently graced the immaculate committee-book of the Royal Circus. You will probably answer, that an action at law will reinstate me: I dare say it is your opinion; nay, upon perusing a paragraph of my former letter, you dropped a hint purporting so much. If this is the case, where was your friendship, where was your attention to my interest, when you had so fair a plea with your brother proprietors, and did not use it? Did they not authorise you to put your name to a memorandum stamping me manager of the Circus for my life? Here they have deserted you as well as me, and branded your name with the discredit of having been affixed to an agreement, which, spight of their former resolution, they here disavow. Was not this

this the moment to command a majority?—

Was not your natural answer,—Gentlemen, you have formerly authorized me to give this man the power he contends for; he has in consequence a legal claim to it; and you shall not so far forfeit all pretensions to justice, as to violate a solemn agreement, which, in your name, has my signature to it;—but, say they, you shall not have your way; so far from it, if even by law he reinstates himself, we will shut up the place for ever, rather than suffer him to receive any emolument from it.

—Why, says you, this is the most vindictive resentment that ever was heard of, and levelled at me as much as the poor devil, the object of your persecution: For, says you, if you shut up the Circus for ever, to spight him, I lose the probable advantage in having laid out my money, and therefore shall also be compelled to go to law with you: Come, come, says you, do not be out of your senses, you cannot vote him out; all the remedy, if he is guilty of neglect, is to bring an action at common law; but can you do this?—

No; he has produced you since your licence three burlettas, one entire pantomime,

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the music and words of another, three dances—altered, and fitted several other matters to the stage, and would be ready to bring out Tom Thumb, two French pieces, two dances, two new pantomimes, and a burletta for sailors, at the shortest notice, but that you have obliged him to discharge all his painters, will not suffer him to have new dresses, and, in short, incapacitated him from doing that which you falsely charge to his neglect.

It cannot fail to appear the most curious piece of ridiculous obstinacy that ever was agitated in a court of justice. Have I not letters from the proprietors respectively, recommending me fit persons to be engaged? Have I not existing articles under penalties? nay, is not even one of the proprietors, at this moment, engaged to me, and that by a written memorandum: In short, it is a measure big with that absurdity which has so long marked the conduct of this unfortunate place; and were not my feelings roused at its cruelty, and my indignation at its injustice, I could laugh at its imbecility, and pity its framers for the poor miserable flimsy pretext, behind which they were obliged

ged to ikulk. What ! be the fabricator of a scheme, give up two years and three months to it, be promised first very near half the profits, then a third and £. 150 a year, then content myself with a fourth, when the proprietors, if I cleared £. 1000 a year, would receive near thirty per cent. for their money, and a considerable advantage from possessing an accumulating stock, and suffer myself, after producing four or five and twenty pieces, to be voted out of a concern, which, from the evidence of all the world, was established by those very pieces ? but my pleas against it are innumerable, and therefore I revert to my original position. You have suffered a majority to go against me ; in that you have forfeited a promise which you were bound to both by friendship and honour. It is in vain to urge that you have but one voice, that you could not rule the opinions of others ; I put all these objections at the time, and your reiterated answer was,—you could command a majority. I have still hope to acknowledge you for that friend whose partiality to me gave me so much pleasure ; and that you will, for the sake of your own honour, as
well

well as your good wishes for me, see that resolution rescinded, which, I will be bold to say, carries in the face of it not only injustice but ingratitude. This I expect from you; and nothing short of this can I be satisfied with.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

King's Bench,

C. DIBDIN.

Feb. 20, 1784.

W. Davis, Bury-street, St. James's.

The day after this, the following letter and resolutions were delivered to me from the Treasurer:

Mr. Charles Dibdin,

BY the direction of the proprietors of the Royal Circus, I send you inclosed a copy of the resolutions entered into by them on the 3d instant.

At

At a Committee of the Proprietors of the
Royal Circus, held at the Cockpit-Royal,
February 3, 1784,

P R E S E N T,

William Davis, Esq;

George Grant, Esq;

Richard Harborne, Esq;

Thomas Bullock, Esq; for Sir John Lade,

Thomas West, Esq; for Mr. West.

Among several other resolutions, it was resolved, That in consequence of Mr. Dibdin's having frequently, and for some weeks past in particular, neglected his duty as the deputy acting manager of the Royal Circus; and being now a prisoner in the King's Bench, whereby the business of the house in his department is wholly neglected, it is therefore absolutely necessary, that the entertainments close on Saturday next.

Resolved, That, in consequence of the above resolution, notice be given to Mr. Dibdin, in the names of the proprietors, that they shall

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dispense

dispense with any further attendance of Mr. Dibdin at the Royal Circus, as the acting manager thereof, or any other engagement they have with Mr. Dibdin respecting the Royal Circus.

(Signed)

George Grant,

Richard Harborne,

For self and *Sir John Lade, Tho. Bullock.*

For Mr. *West, Thomas West.*

And in pursuance of their orders and those resolutions, I hereby give you notice, that you are dismissed from the management of the Royal Circus; and that your attendance there in future will be dispensed with.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

C. GROSSMITH,

Royal Circus,

Secretary and Treasurer.

Feb. 10, 1784.

I was taught to expect this; therefore it brought me with it no surprise, not even the finding it such a master-piece of elegant composition.

position. The other proprietors, it was plain, had given me up. I could not, however, bring myself entirely to think the same of Mr. Davis: impatient for his answer to my last letter, I wrote to him once more.

S I R,

MR. WILDE has called on you several times for an answer to my letter, without the pleasure of finding you at home. You will please to send one by the bearer of this, or else leave it out for a messenger who shall call at your house on Monday morning; otherwise I must suppose, what will give me great pain, that you do not mean to keep your word of honour. At present I will not believe it possible, nor shall all I hear induce me to credit that you can look lightly upon such serious and solemn promises as those you made me, till you sanction the rumour by a refusal under your hand, or a continuation longer than Monday next of this contemptuous silence. I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

C. DIBDIN.

King's Bench, Feb. 20, 1784.

At length I received from him the following letter :

S I R,

I never heard that Mr. Wilde had called at my house since he did me the favour to deliver your message. I should not have delayed for a moment the sending an answer, if I could have written with a probability of mitigating in any degree the mortifications which you must receive in your disagreeable situation, which I am truly sorry for, but have not the power to redress.

The business of the Circus has been attended with a series of perplexing situations previous to the laying the foundation of the building to this hour; hardly a week has passed without some new mischief arising to perplex and involve the parties concerned in that unfortunate undertaking. At this time I find myself considerably above two thousand pounds out of pocket, with a very poor prospect of recovering any part of it. The other proprietors are in the same state. The
sum

sum of money expended is a matter of serious consideration; and to have continued the undertaking a year or two longer in the loose and extravagant manner in which it has hitherto been conducted, would have accumulated a debt that must have overwhelmed and brought some of the parties concerned to a prison.

If I was disposed to sink every guinea I have in the Circus, it is not within my power to oblige the other proprietors to go the same length with me. Your conduct as manager of the undertaking was pronounced the cause of the failure of the Circus; and being scrutinized by four out of five of the proprietors, has been thought sufficiently reprehensible for them to vote your expulsion. You know that a majority determines all matters of business relative to the Circus; therefore my single vote, had I given it, would have answered no purpose.

I need not say that I entertain the highest opinion of your abilities; the alacrity I have shewn in advancing my money to carry on the scheme in St. George's Fields, and the trouble

ble I have taken to forward the business, speak
fully to that point. As a friend, and a very
old acquaintance, I should have had infinite
satisfaction if the project had answered your
expectation; and I am very sorry that your
conduct has lost you the confidence of the
proprietors, who, you must confess, readily
embarked, and in a most liberal manner sub-
scribed, to an undertaking, which, properly
managed, would not have failed to have made
a moderate return to them, and placed you in
an affluent situation. The failure of it has so
far disgusted me, that I am determined to
avoid, as much as possible, every interference
in the business, and to subject myself hereafter
to as little trouble and loss as the case will ad-
mit. I am, Sir, lamenting your misfortunes;

Your friend and humble servant,

Bury-street, WM. DAVIS.

Feb. 23, 1784.

Charles Dibdin, Esq;

So much evasion opened my eyes; I felt
myself duped, and what was worse, I felt I
deserved it: comforting myself, however, with
the reflection, that *being* was something more
honourable

(63)
honourable than *having* deceived, I wrote him
the following letter:

SIR,

I HAVE read your letter of the 23d with
much attention, but spight of my eager incli-
nation to find in it any thing like friendship,
kindness, or liberality, I discover only polite
invective, plausible evasion, insulting civility,
a haughty, cruel consciousness of the inde-
pendence of your situation, and an overstrained
commiseration for the lowness of mine. By
this letter I am convinced of what I have
been so often told, and would never believe,
that your professions of friendship were a
bubble blown up to amuse me, and which
would leave me nothing substantial but the
mortifying knowledge of my own egregious
folly; you shall excuse me, therefore, feel-
ing it rather hard to subscribe myself your
dupe, if in pretty bold language I take the
liberty to answer it. I well know that the
business of the Circus has been attended with
a series of perplexing situations—that you
have advanced above 2000l.—that my con-
duct

duct as manager of the concern has been pronounced the cause of the failure of the Circus—that two out of five of the Proprietors have voted my expulsion—for I do not acknowledge the competency of Mr. Bullock or Mr. West—that a majority are to determine all matters of business—that you have an opinion of my abilities—that you would have been glad had the project answered my expectation—that had it been properly managed it would have placed me in an affluent situation—and that you are sorry for and lament my misfortunes: But I know, and so do you, that I am not the cause of the Circus's perplexities—that though you have advanced, you are not out of pocket 2000l.—that mine has been the only consistent or proper conduct in the whole concern—that the expulsion of the acknowledged manager for life is not a matter of business, but a thing impossible to be done; therefore had your assent given it sanction, the vote would have amounted to nothing—that however you may rate my portion of abilities, you think I have still a larger one of credulity—that an affluent situation to me would have been rather more than a moderate return to

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the Proprietors; the first ten per cent. being theirs, a hundred a year ground rent, a full half of the profits (which in six months cleared them 1800l.) the buildings, the improvements, and the accumulating stock; and lastly, you know that your sorrow and lamentations over my misfortunes are no more than a conscious reflection that you are the cause of them. It will scarcely be believed, that to usurp my dramatic throne, and send me to this indignant exile, so flimsy, so poor, so bungling a pretext, as that of neglect, should be pitched upon. My judges, like those of Socrates, are determined to condemn me right or wrong; this villainous philosopher, say the latter, knows us too well, he speaks profanely of our idols; he is a good man, to be sure, the whole world admires him; but since it will only expose our own ignorance, or perhaps something worse, to investigate the truth, let him die unheard. Thus say the Proprietors; there is no harm in this man, we have the highest opinion of his abilities, he has devoted more than two years to the Circus, and we declared only last October, that, if the licence was not made out in his name,

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we

not should be named; but say the Proprietors,
prieters, we know best our own reasons why
we wish to part with him; be it then resolved,
that he is guilty of neglect—of neglect, echoes
the Treasurer—Oh! he's a sad negligent dog,
cries his very assiduous and worthy col-
league;—neglect lost you the confidence of
the Proprietors, reiterates in pathetic strains
the compassionate and friendly letter of Mr.
Davis. Thus Socrates swallowed the hem-
lock, and I am expelled the Circus. Mine,
however, is no more than a theatrical death;
and you may be assured, when the curtain has
dropped upon your farce, I shall rise again,
and perform my part with more vigour than
ever. To one species of neglect I am ready
to plead guilty; that neglect of having taken
good care of myself; of having insisted on
mens bonds, whose words were not to be
trusted, and of receiving from you as a man
of business, that which, under the mask of
friendship, you promised, without intention of
performing.

But that I have failed to promote and for-
ward the business of the Circus, or attended it
with an assiduity beyond all example, I defy
any

any of you to prove. If, however, it should appear, contrary to the kind expectation of those characters so remarkable for liberality, that I am not totally ruined, but able to procure the means of carrying on an expensive suit; this point a Court of Justice will illucidate; there the terrific menaces which used to scare little children behind the scenes,* make fiddlers tremble in their orchestra, hair-dressers drop their curling-irons with astonishment, and fright the Circus from its propriety, like ugly vizors at the hour of unmasking, will vanish with all their distortion, and discover harmless, insipid countenances, looking for gratification, and finding disappointment.

I shall, however, anticipate no argument intended for the mouth of my counsel, but content myself with shewing you, in a much stronger light than I have hitherto represented the matter, that you either have it in your power to do me justice, or you must be obliged to confess yourself guilty of a premeditated

* Alluding to Mr. Harborne's Oration; which see in its place.

baseness, neither consistent with the character of a gentleman, or a man of honour.

When the draft of the special agreement was delayed, and I apprehended some unpleasant consequences, to quit me of my fears you made me this declaration :—Be perfectly easy ; I do not say that the very words of that agreement which Mr. Sewell has drawn up shall stand in that to be executed, but it is settled among us, that the spirit of that article shall be faithfully adhered to, and all the emoluments and advantages there set down shall be insured to you ; and this declaration you prefaced with the following remarkable words :—“ If you can prove that I ever told a serious lie, I give you leave to call me the greatest villain that ever existed.” With the *same* preface, also, you made me a declaration, when it was reported you were about to part with your share ; that you embarked in the business to serve me ; that you would see me established in it for life ; and that sooner than sell your share, or any part of it, the Circus should bring you to the King’s Bench. No such special agreement has been signed ; you have sold a part of your share ; the application is
obvious ;

obvious; you are—but gratitude forbid that I should wound the bosom of my friend. What possible reason, then, can be given for this extraordinary conduct? I'll tell you; to give eligibility to your place; to learn the trade of conducting it; to possess yourselves of a stock of dramatic materials, I was gulled by promised mountains, which only brought forth real mice; till having gained your point, you violently, against reason, honour, or law, dispossess me of my situation, with a view of adding my fourth of the profits to your half; backed with a self-assurance that I am too poor to right myself. But could you have carried your point, where were the talents to come from to have supplied the Public with variety? Are they to be found among all that glorious confusion of parchment, cobwebs, and sealing-wax, which envelope the muffatees of the elegant and erudite Mr. Harborne? In Mr. Grant's exemplification of tare and tret; Mr. West's drawing-room; your improvement upon Hoyle, or Sir John Lade's study of cock-fighting? Or have you found it in that heap of jarring matter the dancers, fiddlers, furies, and castratos of the Opera-house? and so think, as a theatre is an epitome
of

of the world, that it can not arrive to order, 'till it has sprung out of chaos. However, like the general consequence in all such cases, you have been too cunning for yourselves; the memorandum, Mr. Davis, to which you set your hand, will speak for me in such terms, as shall oblige you to do me legal justice. That due to my honour, I shall take care of myself. Be assured, therefore, I have no fears of righting myself, in spite of the curious and probable stories propagated by the Proprietors, their honest and gentleman-like vote, or your facetious sentimental letter; which, like the fiddle of Nero, at the destruction of Rome, is the instrument of your mirth, at the sight of my misfortunes.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

King's Bench,

C. DIBDIN.

Feb. 25, 1784.

The next news I heard was, that Mr. Grimaldi had the appointment of Manager in my stead; and that Mr. Davis took by the hand that very Mr. Grimaldi, who he himself
told

told me had endeavoured to poison the minds of the Proprietors against me; who he knew to have been guilty of very improper conduct; who he pretended he had the worst opinion of, and who he detested, on account of his underhand treatment of me. As to Mr. Grimaldi himself, he had made a parade of declaring, that he conceived himself under the highest obligations to me; that I had given him his bread at the Circus, and he would rather die, than do any thing that could militate against my interest; he, too, had a particular fancy to being called rascal, whenever he deceived me; but he need not be uneasy for me, he shall peculate in peace, and safely carry his crazy bones to that grave which yawns for them, where the highest compliment mankind can pay his ashes, will be to throw on his memory the veil of oblivion.

I shall detain the reader no longer than while I examine whether it appears that I neglected my duty at the Circus; whether, had that been the case, the Proprietors were competent to dismiss me; and whether, by having voted me out, they have advantaged themselves?

To

have given an industry so indefatigable, an attention so unremitted, that till last Christmas the Proprietors expressed an astonishment at my perseverance. I can safely say, I devoted six hours in every day, upon an average, for near two years and a half, to supplying the Circus with materials; for I have not neglected to do so even to this moment. I actually brought out there twenty-eight performances, twenty-one of which were entirely new. I wrote all advertisements, drew up several memorials and petitions, and gave directions in every department, except relative to the horses, for two years; nor out of the whole number of nights the Circus was opened, did I absent myself more than about fifteen times, the major part of which omissions was owing to the broken promises of Mr. Davis, in the name of the Proprietors, to my creditors.

A further way to see if I have been negligent, is to examine my conduct and Mr. Hughes's together. Have not the Proprietors complained, from the first moment to the last,

last, that nothing could induce Mr. Hughes to produce any single novelty? Did I not project several things for him? Are there not materials for this use, prepared by my directions, as far back as July, 1782? And do not the Proprietors well know that one of my greatest difficulties was continually to torture words into a variety of meanings, differently to announce old manœuvres in new advertisements. Is this the case in relation to me?—so far from it, that, besides what I have already mentioned, so much had I the interest of the place at heart, that when they were determined to open at Christmas, and I felt it could never do, I offered (without any emolument whatever, notwithstanding I had long made a determination to the contrary, and thereby certainly given up many an advantageous situation) to write burlettas in a new stile, and *perform in them myself*. Nay, being well convinced of the impossibility of their providing proper novelty for the commencement of their season, I have repeatedly given them notice of many new performances that are actually now by me, and any three of which might have been performed on last

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Easter

Easter Monday; but they did not even deign to answer these notices.

It will easily be seen then that I did something more than Mr. Hughes; however I will do him the justice to say, that if I did my utmost, so did he his.

Can this conduct then be called neglect, or is this a proper return to it? Is the existence of a man in good professional estimation thus to be sported with? Is he to throw away two years of his time in fabricating a scheme, supplying it with materials, watching the growth of its improvements, superintending and even teaching the performers, and giving it every advantage, perfectness, and consequence? Is he to lessen the reputation of his music by suffering children to perform it, instead of capital fingers at the theatres? Is he to shut himself out from every other concern, to decline all applications that have been and are now made to him? Is he to take back accepted pieces from the theatres, which were sure to yield him considerable profit? and is it reasonable that all this care and pains, loss, and retirement from his former consequence, should

should be rewarded by an expulsion from the very concern that but for him never would have had existence.

The Circus did not apply to me! I found no such place ready built to my hands!! I projected it, fabricated it; it was the child of my own fancy; it was the harbour wherein I meant to moor my bark, as a haven against all the tempests of fortune. Who could have believed that the insidious pilot who steered me to it should be the first, after unlading my cargo, to set me adrift to the buffeting waves of adversity, and the merciless winds of oppression!

As to the competency of the Proprietors to vote me out of the Circus, unless contracts between man and man may be broken at will, the good faith and ingenuous reliance of one man upon the common honesty of another violated at pleasure, and mens names suffered to be affixed to paper merely as a mockery of justice, that competency I think will not be easily proved.

The Proprietors will not deny that it was a very common thing for one of them to un-

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dertake:

+ *W. Davis*

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dertake for the rest; they were collectively liable as in matter of partnership; Mr. Harborne has often accepted drafts for the concern, so has Mr. Davis, exactly in the manner he wrote his name to the memorandum, which instrument, like the agreement of a lease, is efficient till the lease itself is drawn up; and as a proof that the memorandum was compulsory, a special deed was actually prepared, and but that it exacted more than the agreement which compelled it, would have been signed.

As to the remaining question, unless confusion is better than order, stale performances more attractive than novelty, and empty houses more profitable than full ones, the Circus is not at this moment benefited by my absence.

For the rest, it is well the Proprietors can boast of the independency of their fortunes, since they have such poverty of spirit. I cannot omit one caution, however: let it not be believed, because thousands are easily talked

* The difference of the profits this year and last, as I can prove by the receipts, is upon an average upwards of 180l. a week.

of,

of, such immense sums have been expended in the Circus as the world is taught to imagine; it cost enough, and it is pity they had not paid dearer for the folly of neglecting wholesome advice.

Neither will it I hope be credited, that I have received upwards of 2000l. from the Circus, or that I am 3000l. in debt. Upon the faith and honour of a man, previous to last August, I had received no more than about 1100l. and since that time only 50l. or 60l. at most;* out of all which I paid near 700l. and maintained myself and my family since the month of October eighty-one; and I should not at this moment owe more than 100l. had I not been embarrassed as I before described, whereas I am indebted near five.

Thus have I brought this narrative to a conclusion. I pledge myself for the truth of it, and call upon the Public (the neglect of my duty to whom is of consequence to me

* I cannot be exactly correct, for Mr. Hughes, by virtue of *the very legal* seizure he made in my house, is possessed of every private paper I had in the world.

indeed,

indeed, compared to the opinion of the Proprietors of the Circus) to brand me with ingratitude to them, and point me out as an object undeserving their future support, if I am detected of having advanced a single falsity.

Much subordinate matter, I confess, remains behind, which I thought unworthy of public inspection; but if the Proprietors feel bold, I throw down my gauntlet, and dare them to meet me upon that, or any other ground. Indeed I believe, at this hour, if it was not for shame, they would send for me to meet them at the Circus. They need not be unhappy; the law will do that for them, which they have not the resolution to do for themselves; and whenever it happens, they may be assured I shall be most unmercifully revenged of them; I will submit to no whim or caprice, but go on in the exercise of my own judgment. If I wish to expose the temple of chicane, lay open its rascally recesses, and rescue the innocent victims bound at its altars, I will not flinch from my design, even though Mr. Harborne happens to be an attorney. I'll not scruple to tell the world, that horse-
racing

racine is not a moral duty; Pharoah, a system of Philosophy, or Cock-fighting, a study of humanity; even though Sir John Lade and Mr. Davis are gentlemen of the Turf. In short, if instead of five I had five hundred Proprietors to deal with, all of different persuasions, professions, and affections, I will boldly persevere in furnishing such materials as I shall conceive most conducive to amuse the town, and profit the concern; nor will I consider any neglect a crime, or bow to any correction, but that of the generous and candid Public.

F I N I S.



